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AUTHOR Slinski, Margaret D.
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ABSTRACT

The Master Teacher in Family Life model, developed by the University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension, is intended to provide natural leaders within poor communities with information that will enable them to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods. Building on strengths from within the community, the program trains leaders to: (1) support and advise individuals in need of family life information; (2) encourage networking within the poor community through information sharing and group building; and (3) begin community development efforts in order to maintain long-term change in quality of life for adults and youth living in inner city poverty. This document contains a description of the program, a summary of Master Teacher in Family Life accomplishments for the rural model in fiscal year 1990, and a brief outline of Springfield Master Teacher in Family Life Programming accomplishments for the Inner City Project in fiscal year 1989. (TE)

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PIONEER VALLEY OFFICE
15 Straw Avenue
Northampton, Massachusetts 01060
(413) 584-2556

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PROGRAM ABSTRACT
MASTER TEACHER IN FAMILY LIFE MODEL
FAMILIES-AT-RISK PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Margaret D. Slinski

The Master Teacher in Family Life program is a community development/family life training the trainer model that reaches natural leaders within poor communities information and skills that will enable them to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods. Once trained, these leaders (1) support and mentor individuals in need of family life information, (2) encourage networking within the poor community through information sharing and group building, and (3) begin community development efforts in order to maintain long term change in quality of life for adults and youth living in rural or inner city poverty. The program is unique in that it builds strengths from within the community rather than bringing in support from outside.

Because unskilled workers, a majority of which are single head of household in the inner city and unemployed and underemployed young adults in rural areas of the U.S., are having great difficulty finding employment that will bring them above the poverty level, more and more families are living longer in poverty, some of it intergenerational, (Bane and Ellwood, 1987). This long term lack of adequate resources combined with the isolation of living clustered in inner city housing developments, in pockets of poverty in southeastern U.S., or scattered in rural areas has left the poor feeling powerless to take control of their lives. Researchers are concerned that the long term poor's feelings of hopelessness, distrust, despair, fear, hostility and fatalism may result in values, attitudes and norms that will make it difficult to take advantage of employment opportunities in the future. (Chilman, 1988).

This model considers the concept that families living with limited resources isolated from main stream society will continue to feel helpless as long as they exist in an enviroment of hopelessness. Using Bronfenbrenner's, (1981), concepts relative to eco systems, this model attempts to improve the community environment of the poor through identifying strengths within the poor community and using those strengths to help support long term feelings of empowerment for families in the community. The model departs from the typical social work style of supporting those in need through offering short term services to help in crisis. Rather than creating a dependence on "the system", the Master Teacher in Family Life model focuses on Adlerian concepts of encouraging individuals to take care of their own problems through learned information and skill building. It focuses on creating environments of encouragement through building up strengths inside the environment and creating linkages between the natural leaders in the poverty community with helpers in main stream society. Although the model will not result in higher paying jobs, which clearly are needed, it does provide for those in poverty, a more hopeful environment preparing individuals to take advantage of opportunities to improve quality of life as they arise.

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Inner City Model — Margaret D. Slinski
Ginny Green, Program Youth Assistant

Rural Model — Margaret D. Slinski
Karen Barshefsky
Extension Specialist
Youth Development Circuit Rider

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BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES IN POVERTY

YOUTH-AT-RISK PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Long term spells of poverty for today's young families are of special concern to researchers. Some fear the feelings of hopelessness, distrust, despair, fear, hostility and fatalism experienced by those in long term poverty may result in an inability to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities in the future. (Chilman, 1988) Especially vulnerable to these feelings are children in poverty.

In 1986, one out of every five American children lived in poverty. While 16.1% of the children were white, 43.1% were black and 37.7% were Hispanic. The average length of time in poverty for children of female headed households of all races combined was seven years, for black children, twelve years. (Bane and Ellwood, 1983). In most cases these children were poor during the first years of their lives, important developmental years. Not only do these children struggle developmentally, but spiritually, poor children also seem to have difficulties. Rural children living in families with at least one working parent often feel hopeless as they see their parent work while the family continues to live in poverty (O'Hare, 1988). Inner city youth, often lacking exposure to employed male role models, struggle with a confusion of their future role in society, their own hopes for a better quality of life. (Wilson, 1988).

The Master Teacher in Family Life is a program that aims to strengthen today's youth through creating a community of support for young families caught in long term spells of poverty. It is a community development/family life training the trainer model that teaches natural leaders within poor communities information and skills that will enable them to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods. Once trained, these leaders (1) support and mentor individuals in need of family life information, (2) encourage networking within the poor community through information sharing and group building, and (3) begin community development efforts in order to maintain long-term change in quality of life for adults and youth living in rural or inner city poverty. The program is unique in that it builds strengths from within the targeted community, rather than bringing in support from outside.

This model considers the concept that families living with limited resources isolated from mainstream society will continue to feel helpless as long as they exist in an environment of hopelessness. Using Bronfenbrenner's concepts relative to eco-systems, this model attempts to improve the community environment of the poor through identifying strengths within the poor community and using those strengths to help support long-term feelings of empowerment of families in the community. The model departs from the typical social work style of supporting those in need through offering short term services to help in crisis. Rather than creating a dependence on "the system" the Master Teacher in Family Life Model focuses on Adlerian concepts of encouraging individuals to take care of their own problems through learned information and skill building. It focuses on creating environments of encouragement through building up strengths inside the environment and creating linkages between the natural leaders in the poverty community with helpers in mainstream society. Although the model will not result in higher paying employment opportunities, which clearly are needed, it does provide for those in poverty a more hopeful environment preparing individuals, especially children, adolescents, and young adults to take advantage of opportunities to improve quality of life as they arise.

In 1989, within a one year period, in one housing development in Springfield, Massachusetts, twelve trained Master Teachers had a profound effect on the community. First of all, the Master Teachers, themselves changed as they became more confident in sharing information and community building. Through offering over 3,000 volunteer hours aimed at building community support in their neighborhoods, 36 pregnant and parenting teens received ongoing support and information, a teen suicide was prevented, and countless parents were supported as they struggled with their parenting roles under extremely stressful poverty conditions. Group building offered included a Junior Master Teacher teen training reaching 60 young residents, an ongoing dropout prevention program reaching 20 children each week, First Aid trainings, enrichment activities and informal "kitchen discussion groups" for young parents. Outreach to "mainstream society" included trainings offered by clinical specialists invited into the neighborhood, dramatic presentations by local artists and the building of bridges between the schools and the neighborhood via the drop out prevention program. Through newspaper feature stories about the volunteers, the greater Springfield community began to better understand the problems of the poor, resulting in fiscal support for programming that emphasized community building in at risk neighborhoods.

People in this development began talking to each other. They began trusting each other and those "outsiders" who offered quality programming in their neighborhood. With trust came a close knit community and ongoing goals to continue to work for improved quality of life - in spite of the barriers of poverty.

January 1990

ACCOMPLISHMENTS, FISCAL 1990

MASTER TEACHER IN FAMILY LIFE
RURAL MODEL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During the past year, there have been twelve people trained in the Master Teacher in Family Life Program in the Hilltowns of Western Massachusetts. Each Master Teacher became involved in this program through UMass. Cooperative Extension because they saw it as a great opportunity to become more involved with youth and to become better educated in youth related issues. There are a number of youth in the Hilltowns that exhibit "at risk" symptoms, and these Master Teachers want to help.

The four Hilltowns that the Master Teachers are presently from are: Russell, Middlefield, Huntington, and Chester. Their involvement with youth is in a variety of different ways. Some have continued to work with pre-existing youth groups, some have formed new youth groups, some are involved in community development types of activities, and some do a combination of the above. Some of the Master Teachers work together with the same youth, others work independently.

There are currently four active youth groups. Two are in Huntington, one in Russell, and one in Middlefield. The youth group from Middlefield (the most isolated of the towns) was formed after Cooperative Extension became involved and offered support in programming and education for the Master Teachers. Each youth group meets on a regular basis and are involved in a variety of activities. Below are some of the activities that the youth groups are presently involved in:

fundraisers
discussion groups
crafts
trips
dances
organized events for younger children

Each Master Teacher who works directly with youth is expected to document his or her interaction(s) with that particular individual. Many subject areas have come up where information is given to the youth via the Master Teacher. This information could come in the form of technical information, offering resources, offering choices, giving advice, direct interaction with school or family, or simply doing some problem solving with a youth. Below are examples of topic areas that have been discussed between a Master Teacher and some of the youth they are involved with:

peer pressure	alcohol	death
depression	pregnancy	employment
stress	contraceptives	parenting

sexuality	school issues:
satanism	GED preparation
family conflicts	skipping classes
drugs	dropping out

Master Teachers have referred youth to the following:

Huntington Health Center
Franklin/Hampshire Employment and Training Consortium
Family Planning
Guidance Counselors from Gateway Regional

For those youth whose parents are not involved in their lives, the Master Teacher offers support and guidance. The Master Teacher is not there to take the place of a parent, he or she is there as a dependable role model who will support positive growth for youth.

Karen J. Barshefsky
January 1990

II. SPRINGFIELD MASTER TEACHER IN FAMILY LIFE PROGRAMMING

INNER CITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

FISCAL 1989

Accomplishments: In Springfield's inner city poverty neighborhoods fifteen volunteer Master Teachers worked with 40 pregnant and parenting teens (1) giving support and information resulting in healthier pregnancies; (2) encouraging the participation of the father in the parenting process; and (3) helping the teens establish and follow through on long term goals related to education and employability.

In Springfield's inner city high crime poverty neighborhoods Master Teachers designed and implemented a Junior Master Teacher program reaching forty adolescents and pre-adolescents with skills and mentoring helping them achieve academic goals in spite of the many barriers they face on a daily basis.

In Springfield's inner city poverty neighborhoods twelve Master Teachers donated a total of over 3,000 volunteer hours sharing learned information relative to health, education, parenting, substance abuse, money management, AIDS, family planning and interpersonal skills with over two hundred families resulting in increased quality of family life and networking to support long term change in their underclass neighborhood.

In Springfield's inner city community two Master Teacher volunteers designed and implemented a drug awareness program via a training the trainer model impacting eight adults and forty youth soccer players. The adults trained will be working with the sports league throughout the year, mentoring youth relative to substance abuse.

In Springfield's inner city housing projects 80 families participated in a back to school kick off program followed by 20 school aged children participating in a weekly (September to September'90) program focusing on school success.

In Springfield's inner city 15-40 young children participated weekly in enrichment activities offered by the Children's Theater, organized by a Master Teacher.

Resources: Master Teacher in Family Life Volunteers, Community agencies, area artists, sponsoring businesses, Executive Office of Community Development funds.

Implications: Information, enrichment and support, ongoing and in depth, is reaching families at very high risk of becoming members of our current American underclass.

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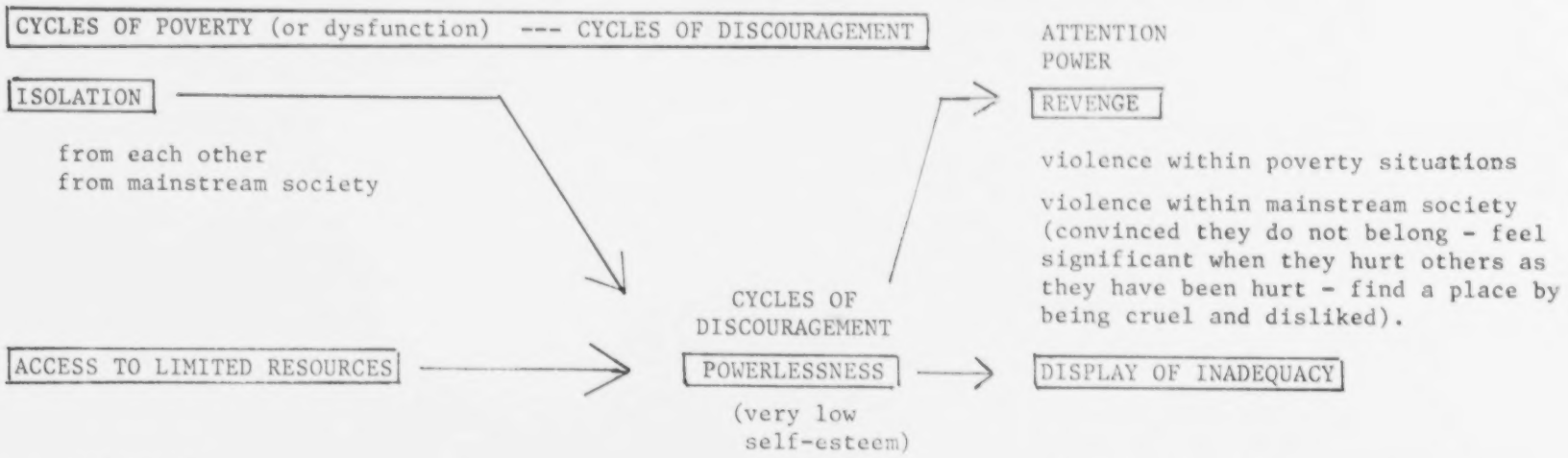
MASTER TEACHER IN FAMILY LIFE

WHY IT WORKS

Currently families at risk, especially families caught in cycles of intergenerational poverty, are unable to achieve long term change toward self-sufficiency. Isolation and inability to use resources effectively have resulted in feelings of powerlessness which are acted out through revengeful acts or giving up.

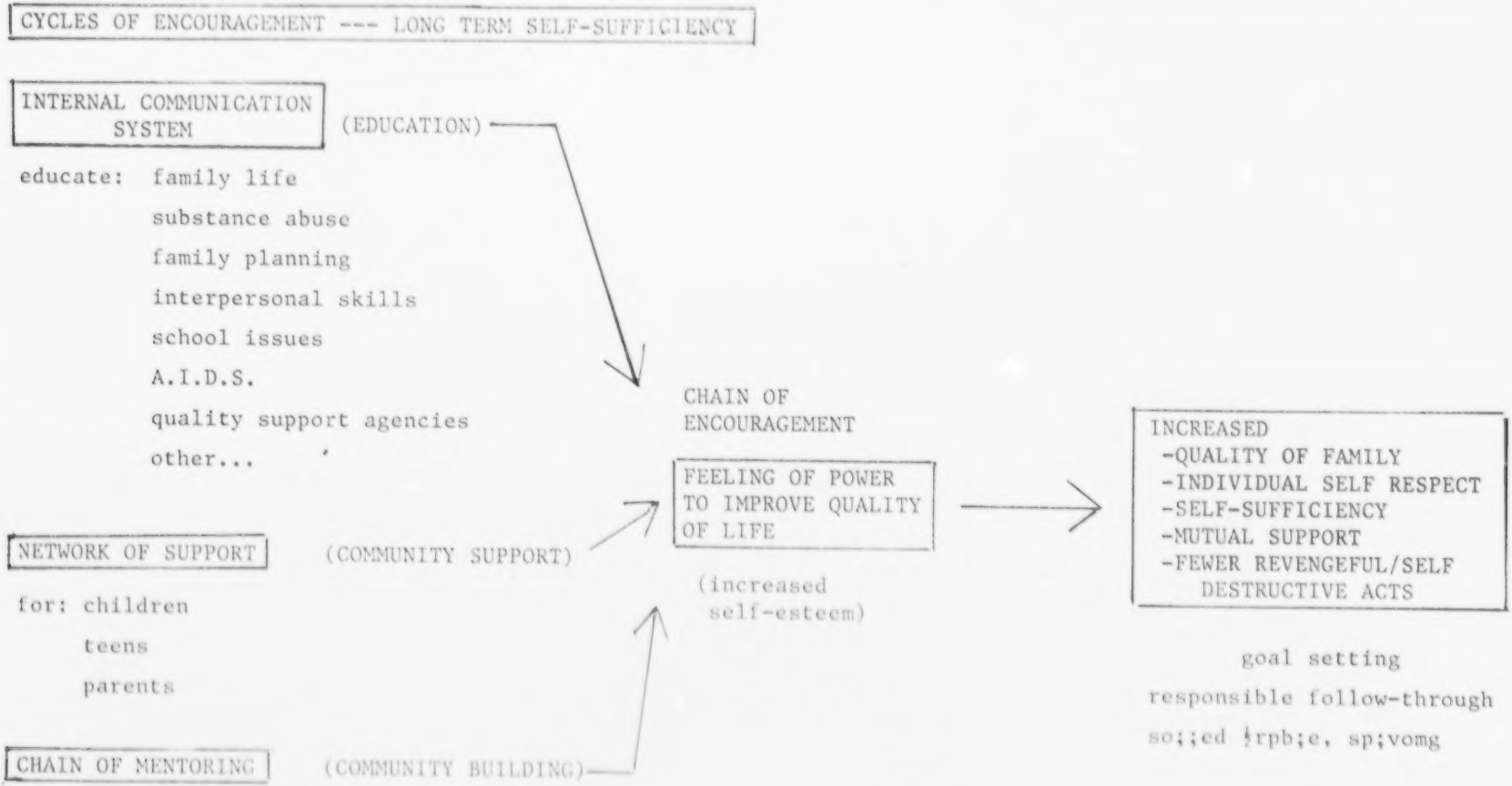

CYCLES OF POVERTY (or dysfunction) --- CYCLES OF DISCOURAGEMENT
ATTENTION
POWER
ISOLATION
REVENGE
from each other
from mainstream society
violence within poverty situations
violence within mainstream society (convinced they do not belong - feel significant when they hurt others as they have been hurt - find a place by being cruel and disliked).
CYCLES OF
DISCOURAGEMENT
ACCESS TO LIMITED RESOURCES
POWERLESSNESS
DISPLAY OF INADEQUACY
(very low
self-esteem)
basic needs
chronic shortage of cash
ability to deal with schools, hospitals, political organizations
inner strength
skills to manage conflict, problem solve
information based related to quality of life
under employment/unemployment
(given up hope of succeeding - keep others from expecting anything of them - give up totally or in areas they cannot succeed)
helplessness/giving up
immobility
murder
suicide
drop-out
teen pregnancy
gangs
substance abuse
avoidance of growth opportunity
return to "safe ground" of intergenerational coping strategies

Margaret D. Slinski, Extension Specialist
University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension January, 1990

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS COOPEATIVE EXTENSION

MASTER TEACHER IN FAMILY LIFE

With the cooperation of Greter Springfield businesses, human services agencies, government, educational and religious institutions the quality of life for families at risk would be enhanced to promote long term self-sufficiency. The Master Teachers in Family Life model is a community development/family life education program that works as follows:



Margaret D. Slinski, Extension Specialist
University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension January, 1990